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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

OF THE LATE

MATTHEW BAILLIE, M. D.

BY JAMES WARDROP, ESQ.

SURGEON EXTRAORDINARY TO THE KING.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

THERE never was, perhaps, a period in which Medicine was practised with more renown, than during the last thirty years in Great Britain. Whilst the rest of Europe was suffering under all the horrors of war and civil discord, a zeal for the cultivation of science was kindled in this country ; and in no branch of human knowledge was it more ardent, or more successfully prosecuted, than in the study of Medicine. As no individual held a more exalted station in the medical profession, during this period, than the late Dr. Baillie ; it is hoped that the present attempt to record some of the more prominent incidents of his life, will be received as an humble, though sincere tribute of respect to the memory of that distinguished Physician.

It is no less instructive than it is pleasing, to contemplate the life and character of men who have performed the duties of their profession with honour and ability. Their example has a powerful influence on the human mind ; and Biography becomes of great importance to mankind, when it can hold up for imitation the example of those who have been distinguished as much for their moral worth as their intellectual endowments. Indeed, in no department of civilized life can the moral character be so justly appreciated, as in the medical profession. In the exercise of his duties, so much depends on the honour and integrity of the physician, that, when possessed of those high endowments, he is deservedly entitled to public gratitude and respect ; while his character cannot be too highly estimated by his professional brethren.

Dr. Matthew Baillie was a native of Scotland : he was born in the year 1757, in the manse of Shots, in the county of Lanark, where his father was the clergyman ; a spot well known to the writer of these pages ; and though remarkable only for the barrenness of its soil, and the ungenial nature of its climate, it is now rendered

worthy of the traveller's notice, as the birth-place of an illustrious man. His father was soon afterwards removed to the church of Hamilton, and, when his son was in his thirteenth year, was elected Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow. After having had all the advantages of an excellent general education in that University, and at Oxford, where he took his degree in 1787, young Baillie came to London in his nineteenth year, to commence his medical studies under the immediate superintendence of his uncles, William and John Hunter, the two most distinguished medical men then in the metropolis.

In the Museums and Dissecting-rooms of those great men, was laid the foundation of all Dr. Baillie's future acquirements and reputation. He soon distinguished himself as an expert and skilful anatomist, and, in two years from the commencement of his studies, became chief teacher in the anatomical theatre. He had not been thus employed more than twelve months, when Dr. William Hunter died, bequeathing to his nephew, as long as he should teach anatomy, the use of that Museum, which is now deposited in the University of Glasgow, and forms so noble a

monument of its Founder. It may be here remarked, as a most extraordinary circumstance, that two brothers should have collected the two most splendid and most extensive museums extant; and it is hardly possible for any person who now visits them, to conceive that either could have been the work of a single individual.

Two years after his uncle's death, Dr. Baillie gave his first complete course of anatomical lectures. As a lecturer, he soon attained great eminence, being remarkable for the simplicity and perspicuity of his demonstrations, the order and method of his style, and the clearness and distinctness of his delivery.

The taste which the Hunters created in this country for the study of Morbid Anatomy, marks the period in which they lived as one of the most important, perhaps, and proud eras in medical history; and their nephew soon acquired a taste for this branch of medicine, which he cultivated with great assiduity.

Surrounded by the labours of his uncles in morbid anatomy, it was not long before he made an admirable use of the valuable stores contained in their museums. A multitude of important

pathological facts were there illustrated, which he subsequently arranged, and made the basis of his work on *Morbid Anatomy*, first published in 1795, —a work which, whether we consider the subject or the manner in which it is treated, must be estimated as a most valuable acquisition to medical science. Till that period, all the information to be found on this subject was scattered through the writings chiefly of Bonetus and Morgagni ; so that the distinct and concise account of the diseased changes of different organs given by Dr. Baillie, formed not only a most accurate elementary work, but was no less useful as a general treatise. The estimation in which it was held abroad, was shown from the fact of its having been translated into both French and German soon after publication.

About four years after the appearance of the “*Morbid Anatomy*,” the “*Engravings*” for its elucidation were published ; and of these it may be truly said, that, for choice of subject, accuracy of drawing, and beauty of engraving, they have never been excelled ; and along with the work, must remain a lasting memorial of the zeal, the industry, and the talent of their author. To these

publications may be added several Papers, which appeared at intervals in the Transactions of the Royal Society, of the Society for the Improvement of Medical and Surgical Knowledge, and of the College of Physicians; in all of which are to be found some pathological facts worthy of record.

While Dr. Baillie was occupied in the investigation of morbid anatomy, and in giving lectures, he did not fail to take every opportunity of preserving, for a private collection, specimens of diseased organs; and though small, when compared with that of either of the Hunters, yet the Museum, he thus formed, is highly worthy of him, and contains many excellent and well chosen specimens, illustrating almost every organic change. It may here be noticed, that, three years before his death, he gave this Collection to the College of Physicians, with 600*l.* for the purpose of keeping it in a fit state of preservation; and that, by his will, he has added his Medical Library containing an excellent selection both of ancient and modern works. Dr. Baillie seemed strongly impressed with the importance of the study of morbid anatomy to the physician; and, in depositing his collection in that College, he indulged

the hope that some of its members might be stimulated to similar pursuits.

About the year 1787, Dr. Baillie was appointed one of the physicians of St. George's Hospital. Till then, his opportunities of studying the practical part of his profession had been comparatively limited ; but great assiduity and attention enabled him to acquire that tact in discriminating diseases which formed a striking feature in his future character ; an acquirement which few attain who have not had constant opportunities of visiting the sick in early life.

After having, for thirteen years, faithfully and assiduously performed the duties of his office in St. George's Hospital, he resigned that appointment, giving up, at the same time, his anatomical lectures. The resignation of St. George's Hospital was highly praiseworthy ; for the medical officers of hospitals have often been severely censured for retaining such situations from unworthy motives, and thus sacrificing the original and charitable objects of those institutions to their own selfish views ; but, on all occasions of this kind, Dr. Baillie indulged in an honourable and just pride, and never hesitated to relinquish, for

the public good, what some might have considered his own personal interest.

There is no profession, perhaps, in which the progress of even the best qualified is so slow as in the practice of physic: this necessarily arises from success depending entirely on individual exertion and assiduity; and it is a well known fact, that most of those medical men, who have had the greatest share of public confidence, have all previously been considerably advanced in years. This was the case, in a remarkable degree, with Dr. Baillie; for, when the great celebrity of the latter years of his life is considered, it might have been expected that he would have early enjoyed no small portion of his fame. It was not, however, till he had reached his fortieth year, that he found himself fairly established in private practice: but it should seem as if he had only required to be known; for, from that period, he became at once completely engaged in the practical part of his profession, and, in a very few years rose to that eminence so universally acknowledged.

It is curious to trace the variety of circumstances which have led medical practitioners to

celebrity in this metropolis. Dr. Baillie was one of the very few physicians of his day, whose success is to be attributed wholly to professional skill, adorned with the most estimable private virtues. Minute anatomical study had been too much disregarded by physicians, and conceived necessary only for those who practised Surgery. His comprehensive knowledge of anatomy, therefore, could not fail to give him immense advantages over those who were competing with him for private practice. Whenever more than ordinary scientific precision was wanted, he was now resorted to; and the advantages which his anatomical skill afforded him, completely established his reputation among the better informed members of his profession.

Dr. Baillie possessed, in an eminent degree, a facility in distinguishing diseases,—one of the most important qualities in the practice of medicine; a want of accurately discriminating symptomatic from primary affections, leading to the most serious errors; whilst, when a disease is once distinctly characterised, and the peculiarities of the case defined, the cure may be considered as half performed. Habits of attentive

observation had also enabled him to know, with great accuracy, the precise extent of the powers of medicines; indeed, there was no class of cases more likely to fall under his observation than those in which they had been abused, younger practitioners being apt to carry a particular system of treatment beyond its proper limits; Dr. Baillie's readiness, therefore, in seeing this abuse, rendered his opinions, in many such cases, of great value.

In nothing did he excel more than in the clearness, the conciseness, and the unaffected simplicity of the mode of delivering or of writing his opinions. He had the particular merit of leaving no ambiguity in the mind of his patient; and the language he employed was so plain, and so free from scientific jargon, that I have often heard them repeat, word for word, all they had heard him say on such occasions. He possessed also, in an unusual degree, the power of simplifying and illustrating, by analogy, what appeared complex and unintelligible, and was thus able to give patients a correct and satisfactory idea of the nature of their complaints.

He had a most natural, unassuming, but de-

cided manner, which, in the exercise of his professional duties, was the same to all persons, and on all occasions. His mind was always quietly, but eagerly directed, to the investigation of the symptoms of the diseases of his patients; and he had so distinct and systematic a mode of putting questions, that their answers often presented a connected view of the whole, and could not fail to impress them with his clear and comprehensive knowledge.

Dr. Baillie was also remarkable for the consideration he paid to the feelings and character of his professional brethren, more particularly to the younger branches, and others who did not enjoy the full confidence of the public; and nothing more strongly marked the respect and value they entertained for him, than their universal expression of sorrow when the intelligence of his death reached the metropolis.

The same liberal and just principles which, on all occasions, guided his conduct in private life towards individuals, were equally remarkable in his public duties; he never countenanced any measures which had the appearance of oppression or hostility towards the members of his

profession. Men seldom act, collectively, with the same honour and integrity, as they would do individually ; and a member of a public body requires an unusual share of moral courage who opposes those measures of his associates, which he may not himself approve of ; but if there was one quality more than another, which gave Dr. Baillie the public confidence he enjoyed, and raised him to the zenith of professional distinction, I should say that it was his inflexible integrity.

The extent of Dr. Baillie's practice, and the number of years in which he was fully occupied, enabled him not only to indulge in every worldly comfort and luxury, but to amass a very considerable fortune. With feelings of proper value for his talents and rank in his profession, he was at the same time most liberal when he suspected the circumstances of the individual required it ; whilst, on all occasions of generosity, and in deeds of charity, his bounty was conspicuous.

He received all those professional distinctions due to his merits. He was a member of the Royal Societies of London and Edinburgh, and of many other learned bodies ; he was the

first President of the Medical and Chirurgical Society, and one of the Physicians to the late King.

Such was his public life ; the brief narrative of its close now only remains.

Dr. Baillie continued to be completely engaged in the arduous, and, to his mind, often irksome duties of his profession, with the exception of an annual relaxation of a few months in every autumn. One of the first seasons in which he took this indulgence, he devoted to a visit to the “ home of his fathers,” after an absence of thirty years. The love of country was a prominent feature in his character ; and though his habits and avocations precluded him from contemplating a permanent residence in Scotland, yet his soul was ever awake to the welfare of his native land. The feelings which this journey awakened, proved very different from what he had allowed his imagination to paint ; and I have heard him express the sorrow he experienced in witnessing the sad changes which, during so long an absence, had occurred in the small circle of his connexions, and amongst the companions of his early years ; and it may

easily be conceived, that a mind and heart like his, could have little satisfaction, in being, as it were, compelled to contrast his own triumphant success with the domestic misfortunes of many of his schoolfellows.

Dr. Baillie's health had for some years suffered from the fatigue of business; and it may justly be said, that he fell a victim to the constant excitement of his professional duties. His physical frame was far from being originally robust; and, as it often happened that he had more business than it was possible for him to perform, he fell gradually into a state of exhaustion past relief from repose; and this happening day after day, and month after month, wore out his body more than the tranquillity and retirement of a few months in the country every season were sufficient to restore. During the last spring, a manifest change took place in his appearance. Already much wasted, he now became extremely emaciated and feeble; and though the faculties of his mind remained perfect, there were times when these even were deprived of their wonted vigour.

In the early part of the summer, he had an attack of inflammation of the mucous membrane

of the trachea, which, though it at first created little disturbance, became, in the month of June, very troublesome, being attended with some fever, and a frequent cough. In this state he quitted London for Tunbridge Wells, and returned in a few weeks, the more teasing symptoms of cough having been relieved by local bleeding and blisters; but in no respect had his general health improved. His feebleness was now so great, that even conversation was a considerable effort; and he had lost all relish for food. Though aware that his situation was precarious, he seemed to entertain the hope of being able to return to London in the winter; for he was persuaded that he had no organic affection, and that by repose, and living in the country, the digestive organs would be to a certain extent restored. Such were the expressions he then used, when adverting to his situation.

With these hopes he went down to his residence in Gloucestershire; but instead of gaining strength after his arrival there, he became daily more and more enfeebled. Besides Dr. Barron, whose attendance was unremitting, he was visited by his friends Sir Henry Halford, Dr. Maton, and

Dr. Warren ; but their efforts, aided by all the tender and anxious cares of an affectionate Wife and dutiful Children, were unavailing to ward off the fatal blow ; and, after much bodily suffering, but with a mind unshaken, he expired on the 23d of September, 1823. Thus terminated the life of a man, at once an example to the living for his virtues—his inflexible integrity, his great moral worth, his benevolence to his afflicted fellow-creatures, and for his high intellectual endowments !

Dr. Baillie was married, in the thirtieth year of his age, to the eldest daughter of the late celebrated Dr. Denman, by whom he had a son and daughter. As has been observed by a contemporary writer, the extent of talent united in his family and connexions is remarkable : not only was he the son of an able Professor, and nephew of the Hunters, but Miss Johanna Baillie, his sister, attained the most elevated rank in literature by her Plays on the Passions. Mrs. Baillie's sister was married to the late Sir Richard Croft, a man whose name is endeared in the recollection of many, as well for his manly and upright heart, as for his professional celebrity ; and Mr.

Denman, the celebrated counsellor, was also Dr. Baillie's brother-in-law.

Of Dr. Baillie's character in domestic life, it becomes me to say little : a mind so well regulated, and a heart so full of tenderness and benevolence to his suffering fellow-creatures, could not fail to impart joy and affection to the bosom of his family. The pleasure which the constant opportunities his profession afforded him of doing good, the lustre of his career, together with all the blessings of domestic happiness, infused a pleasing glow on his hours of recreation, and inspired everywhere around him a contented cheerfulness!

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